T-16

T. J. Kaczynski
Stemple Pass Road
Lincoln, Montana 59639
July 23, 1984

Professor Sherman J. Preece
Department of Botany
University of Montana
Missoula, Montana 59812

Dear Professor Preece:

Thank you very much for your courteous reply to my inquiry concerning the buffalo gourd, Cucurbita foetidissima. Actually your letter was quite helpful. Though it did not definitely answer the question of edibility, it did give enough information to indicate that the plant is probably not worth experimenting with.

Kirk (author of the book that recommended the fruit of C. foetidissima) presumably relied on some report that the gourd was eaten by Indians; but the Indians may have eaten it only when "hard up" or they may have had some elaborate process for making it edible, as with certain other plants. Also, it is interesting to speculate that primitive peoples who eat certain fibrous, purgative, or otherwise objectionable plants from early childhood may become to some extent acclimated, so that their digestive systems are able to handle what would give a nasty upset to a civilized man.

Be that as it may, thanks again for your help.

Sincerely yours,

T. J. Kaczynski

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18 July 1984

T. J. Kaczynski
Stemple Pass Road
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Dear Mr. Kaczynski:

I can't be of much help to you on the Cucurbita problem since personal knowledge is lacking in regard to C. foetidissima on my part and none of my references consider the edibility of the roots. The following information may be slightly relevant to some questions. Lewis and Lewis in their 1977 Medical Botany indicate that cucurbitacins are known to occur widely in the Cucurbitaceae and most cucurbitacins are known to be purgative. Arthur Cronquist in his 1981 An Integrated System of Classification of Flowering Plants explains that alkaloids are frequently produced in the Cucurbitaceae which contains bitter purgative cucurbitacins.

Repeated boiling through several changes of water may remove some of these materials but the plant would have to be particularly enticing for me to go to such trouble and still run a risk of toxicity. And, of course, individuals vary in their sensitivity to many chemicals.

Sorry I can't give you more definite answers.

Sincerely,

Sherman J. Preece

Sherman J. Preece
Professor of Botany

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